

In any organization, effective decisions require effective leadership. This applies to business, politics and First Nations communities.

With respect to First Nations resource development, the Band Council, including the Chief, carries ultimate responsibility for strategic planning, fiscal controls, policy development, monitoring and measuring success, selecting and directing senior staff and establishing committees. Even when the First Nations community creates a development agency, it ultimately reports to the higher authority of Council.

In addition, to all of these responsibilities, a First Nations council also has an obligation to keep itself trained, informed and ready to assess new opportunities.

To be a positive force in economic development, the Council, and the committees it establishes, must be disciplined, anticipate issues, prepare for meetings and never meet just for the sake of a meeting.

Councils, like any elected group, should operate on a decision cycle. Each new annual plan for community development requires research, understanding the present, defining future goals and determining how goals will be reached. Planning the cycle also means agreeing on corrective measurements should plans appear to be off course during the cycle.

There is a goal-setting system called S.M.A.R.T.E.R. where each letter has a meaning as follows. Specific. Measurable. Attainable. Realistic. Tangible. Extending/Evaluating and Rewarding. It works for all top-level bodies directing planning in organizations, including First Nations.

Leadership in economic development also involves the ability to work with others.

When it comes to working with partners, this means understanding their priorities, how they make decisions, their capacities as well as their motives for entering the deal. Of course, partners need to have the same understanding of First Nations.

Working well with consultants means that First Nations leaders should give them clear direction, monitor their work, have agreed milestones and termination clauses.

Working well with staff requires that First Nations leaders involve staff in goal-setting, have fair performance assessment systems and respect professionalism.

If all of these disciplines are followed, and strengthened by clear, continuous communication to all stakeholders, First Nations leaders can be the leading force in economic development.

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